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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

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SUBJECT: "Improvements in Marketing Fresh Fruits and Vegetables" - Information from marketing specialists, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture

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When a novelist needs to place a housewife in a typically domestic scene... he usually sets her down to shelling peas. But this time-honored symbol of domesticity may soon be a thing of the past.

Inventors are now at work on a machine for shelling peas and Lima beans. When it's perfected.. the housewife of tomorrow can buy peas already shelled... just as she is now able---in some parts of the country---to buy sweet corn husked by machine immediately after it's picked.

The machine for husking sweet corn is just one of the many improvements designed to offer better quality and to cut down waste of fresh fruits and vegetables in modern marketing.

Homemakers in Columbus, Ohio can get a preview of the market of tomorrow in their hometown where one of the large food chain stores is working in cooperation with the Ohio State Experiment Station and a number of packaging firms.

The purpose of the Columbus experiment is to find ways of cutting down on the waste and spoilage of fresh fruits and vegetables. At present...the chain store estimates this waste to be about 25 percent of the total crop. And grocery buyers as well as farm producers suffer from this loss.

As you know--of course--we already have many improvements in packaging fresh produce. For several years we've been able to buy such fresh vegetables as tomatoes, mushrooms and spinach done up in cardboard boxes with transparent film windows in a way to protect the vegetables from handling and spoilage.

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May 28, 1946

Packaging is one method of cutting down waste. Refrigeration is another. Fresh fruits and vegetables not only hold up better but they also retain more vitamins when they are kept at low temperatures. And the grocer finds it easier to refrigerate the fruits and vegetables when they are packaged.

The Columbus experiment is the first attempt to cut waste of fresh fruits and vegetables by using both packaging and refrigeration. In the stores taking part in the experiment there's a colorful array of fresh fruits and vegetables in the self-service refrigerated cases...green beans, tomatoes, spinach, cauliflower, broccoli, cucumbers, carrots, lettuce, and a salad mix of several vegetables. The temperature is kept around 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Though you may be interested chiefly in the quality of fresh vegetables and fruits you buy...you are also interested in the price. You and your family stand to profit from improvements that cut the costs. Along this line...the Ohio study shows that packaging may reduce costs. If carrots are topped when they are packaged it will reduce shipping cost by one fourth. If the outer jacket of cauliflower is cut away and a lighter shipping container used...the cost of shipping cauliflower can be cut almost two-thirds.

It will--of course--be necessary to carry on further experimental work before it's possible to draw any final conclusions about the benefits and disadvantages of consumer packaging. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture is working in cooperation with an Eastern chain store organization to measure the costs involved and the effects of packaging and refrigeration on quality of fresh fruits and vegetables. But the pioneer work at Columbus does point to very real improvements. Many of these methods of marketing fresh fruits and vegetables will assure consumers of tomorrow a higher quality of produce at no material increase in cost.

